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ABSTRACT

In 1991, a survey was conducted of 150 black female administrators at the department chair level and above at 65 community colleges in 19 states. The questionnaire solicited information on respondent characteristics, such as age, degrees, and salary, and their perceptions of the degree to which each of 20 variables positively or negatively affected their workplace performance and career advancement. Respondents were also asked to list "do's" and "don'ts" for black women administrators. Surveys were returned by 50 respondents, for a response rate of 33%. Variables which generated highly positive responses for both workplace performance and career advancement were self-worth, amount of education, verbal skills, writing skills, and leadership ability. Most respondents (25 of 38) indicated that skin color had a negative impact on workplace performance, and 20 of 36 respondents indicated that skin color had a negative impact on career advancement. Selected comments made by respondents regarding the variables ethnicity, apparel, marital status, self-worth, leadership ability, supervisor support/mentor relationships, and general issues are attached, along with a representative sample of the more than 500 responses to the final "administrator do's and don'ts" question. (JMC)

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A SURVEY OF FACTORS AFFECTING WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE
AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS
IN MIDDLE AND UPPER LEVEL MANAGEMENT POSITIONS
IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

PRESENTED AT LEADERSHIP 2000
CHICAGO, IL
JULY 8, 1991

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OVERALL SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

As members of the 1989-90 Expanding Leadership Opportunities for Minorities Program sponsored by the League for Innovation, we had the opportunity to share our experiences in career advancement and professional development. Our collective professional experiences as women administrators coupled with previous research suggested that there is concern about the impact of certain internal and external factors on the workplace performance and career advancement of black women in community colleges. This notion gave rise to our study: A Survey of Factors Affecting Workplace Performance and Career Advancement of Black Women Administrators in Middle and Upper Level Management Positions in Community Colleges.

DATA COLLECTION

A questionnaire was developed and mailed in mid-March of 1991 to 150 black female administrators at the department chair level and above in 19 states and 65 different districts or campuses. Fifty respondents returned surveys by mid-April. They represented 27 different districts or campuses in 12 states.

The first section of the questionnaire elicited statistical data: age, degrees, present position and the two preceding positions with length of time in each, salary and funding source, and type of position (student services or instructional).

The second and third sections contained twenty variables: gender, age, ethnicity, height, weight, skin color, apparel, hair style, marital status, sense of self-worth, years of experience, educational training, morals/ethics, verbal skills, non-verbal communication, writing skills, mentor relationships, management style, leadership ability and supervisor support. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each factor positively or negatively affected their workplace performance and career advancement, respectively. The "negatively affected" and "positively affected" categories were divided into three groups: very much affected, moderately affected, and mildly affected. An N/A column was also included.

In the last section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to list do's and don'ts for black women administrators.

The overall results of the questionnaire were positive. Respondents were very willing to share personal information--both positive and negative. The written responses were voluminous.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

- 58% of the women are between the ages of 41-50; 22% are between the ages of 51-60; 18% are 40 and below.
- 48% of the women have an Ed.D or Ph.D; 48% have Master's degrees; 4% have Bachelor's degrees.
- 6% of the women surveyed are President/Provost; 42% are Vice President/Dean; 46% are Division/Department Head; 4% are Faculty/Other.

- When asked if the time of their present position reflects the appropriate level of responsibility, 76% responded yes.
- The average salary reported by the respondents was \$59,000, ranging from \$28,000-90,000.
- 90% of the women surveyed said their salary is District funded; 2%, grant funded.
- 46% of the women surveyed work in student services positions; 48% work in instructional areas positions.

When asked to list the two positions held prior to their present position, answers were as follows:

- **Position 1** - 2% of women surveyed held a previous position of President/Provost; 8% Vice President/Dean; 66% Division/Department Head; 18% Faculty/Other.
- **Position 2** - 6% of women surveyed held a previous position of Vice President/Dean; 64% Division/Department Head; 26% Faculty/Other.

Time spent in the two previous positions were as follows:

- **Position 1** - 50% of women surveyed spent 1-5 years in this position; 32% 6-10 years; 2% 11-15 years; 2% over 15 years.
- **Position 2** - 66% of women surveyed spent 1-5 years in this position; 28% 6-10 years; 2% over 15 years.

SURVEY OUTCOME

The study used a questionnaire which elicits responses to twenty variables and the degree to which those variables make an impact on workplace performance and career advancement. The variables which generated highly positive responses are delineated below:

Variable	Workplace Performance			Career Advancement		
	Frequency**	Percent**	Mean*	Frequency**	Percent**	Mean*
Self-worth	43	86	1.9	42	84	1.9
Amount of Education	42	84	1.8	36	72	2.1
Verbal Skills	45	90	1.5	41	82	1.8
Writing Skills	45	90	1.5	40	80	1.8
Leadership Ability	42	84	1.9	39	78	1.9

- * Values range from 1-7: 1 = highly positive; 2 = moderately positive; 3 = mildly positive; 4 = mildly negative; 5 = moderately negative; 6 = very negative; 7 = Not Applicable.

- ** The total of the value of 1 and 2.

Respondents indicated that their educational training was more positive in affecting their workplace performance than their opportunity for career advancement.

The only variable which showed a clearly negative response was skin color with 25 of the 38 respondents indicating that skin color has a negative impact on workplace performance and 20 of the 36 respondents indicating that skin color has a negative impact on career advancement.

The most ambiguity is seen in the response to ethnicity and its impact:

	Workplace Performance	Career Advancement
Highly Positive	9	6
Moderately Positive	6	5
Mildly Positive	11	12
Mildly Negative	2	6
Moderately Negative	5	8
Very Negative	11	11
Not Applicable	6	2

More than a third of the respondents indicated that height and weight were not applicable. Gender results were fairly even with no clear positive or negative. Age was mildly positive; experience, non-verbal communication, support of supervisor, management style were moderately positive. Hair style, apparel, marital status, and morals/ethics fell into the mildly positive category.

DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON

Surprised by our generally positive survey results, we decided to compare our findings to those of a recent study: Perspectives on Leadership and Black Women Presidents conducted by JoAnn Bradley, Patricia Carey, and Evelyn Whitaker (1989). The major purpose of this study was to survey black women presidents to get first hand impressions of issues and concerns associated with their presidencies. Results of the Bradley, Carey, Whitaker study revealed that most of the respondents seem to have turned negative experiences regarding their race and gender into positive factors to be utilized in reaching their goals. According to their researchers, respondents appeared to have brought to their leadership high motivation, determination, and a set of survival behaviors that were an outgrowth of those negative experiences.

Yolanda Moses' study, Black Women in Academe: Issues and Strategies, published by the Project on the Status and Education of Women of the Association of American Colleges in 1989 was also examined. In her position paper, Ms. Moses explored the climate for black women students, faculty members, and administrators in colleges and universities. This paper focused on ways that race and gender stereotypes can combine to create double obstacles for black women. Moses reported that despite chilly climates on many campuses, many black women enjoyed their jobs in academe, and they found many aspects of their experiences quite positive (Moses, 1989).

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that as a result of the Survey of Factors Affecting Workplace Performance and Career Advancement of Black Women Administrators in Middle and Upper Level Management Positions in Community Colleges and the ensuing discussion, strategies for overcoming barriers to success will be developed. Also, it is important that this discussion facilitate the creation of an institutional climate and culture that is conducive for all people of color.

While the factors surveyed may be common to all community college administrators, our goal was to explore their unique impact on black women. This exploratory survey will be followed by a more comprehensive study.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON VARIABLES

Respondents were asked to comment on the choices they made in determining the degree to which the variables made an impact on their workplace performance and career advancement. The following are a few of the comments and the variable to which the comments apply.

ETHNICITY

I personally do not feel that my race is a factor as it relates to my professionalism. I refuse to permit negative restraints which restrict my interaction with our staff and students. Negative thoughts are the responsibility and beliefs of negative toxic people.

My good rapport with my **supervisor, the Vice President** for Academic Affairs, the President, and my own skills and personal style have moderated the negative impact of prejudices based on my gender and race.

APPAREL

I have been **criticized by faculty for dressing too well.**

"Natural/Afro" hairstyle elicits comments.

MARITAL STATUS

Interracial marriage with four of five children adopted generally positive.

SELF WORTH

Being a single women, being African-American, I was not as confident as I should have been. In retrospect I was great but it took/takes tremendous effort and long hours. I know the importance of having a support system personally and professionally.

LEADERSHIP ABILITY

The double "bind" exists wherein white females under your supervision do not accept those traits that top administrators find necessary.

When others have poor administrative/leadership skills/abilities, it gets in the way of my effectiveness.

SUPERVISOR SUPPORT/MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

Mentor relationship has been positive for me personally but was not looked upon favorably by others at my institution.

It would be great to have "sister" support systems in the work places! Also a mentor to call on when you need one--and to remember all black folks don't want to "unite", hard to take but a "real" reality!

Support of person to whom I report is most essential when working toward mutually agreed upon changes.

GENERAL

I have found that men are intimidated by the color of my skin (Black), my height and ability to communicate. Because I'm attractive many expect to use their skills as male/potential mates...to get over. They're surprised by my lack of interest, professionalism and desires and ability to stay on "task."

I think that my race (Afro-American), skin tone (mid-range), communication skills and doctorate got me in the door. Very hard work keeps me here and keeps the respect of colleagues.

Black women are "clustered" in low and middle management.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR BLACK WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS

Respondents were also asked to list do's and don'ts for black women administrators. The following listing is a representative sample of the more than five hundred responses given. The do's and don'ts are grouped according to survey variables in order to give them structure.

GENDER/AGE/ETHNICITY/SKIN COLOR

Do require that you be accepted not only based on your professional and academic achievement but also based on your ethnic and gender characteristics.

Be proud of your ethnicity, but don't make it an everyday issue.

Consider your heritage as positive and share experiences.

Ethnicity and gender may be assets and ought to provide your unique perspective.

Don't fail to accept the reality that gender, race and class are issues in decision making.

Don't use ethnicity as a reason for anything, positive or negative!

Don't forget that racism and sexism exist in colleges.

Don't cry racism at every slight.

Don't enable/encourage ethnic defamation through silence.

Don't assimilate and mimic, denying ethnicity and gender.

Don't fall into "black woman" or "woman" manager mindset.

Don't become "slave" to male supervisor "master;" i.e., being taken advantage of in doing "grunt" work.

APPAREL/HAIRSTYLE

Maintain professional appearance.

Make sure personal appearance and style reflect your role.

SELF WORTH

Be confident and display it.

Have a clear sense and appreciation of self.

EXPERIENCE

Develop a strategic plan for your career development.

Don't take "staff" position but seek "line" positions.

Don't fail to change jobs, cities, states when opportunities appear.

EDUCATION

Get the doctorate!

MORALS/ETHICS

Be honest; have integrity.

Admit when you've made an error and be willing to say "I'm sorry."

Treat people the way you want to be treated.

Be yourself yet assess each individual setting to determine best strategies for influencing decision-making; policy making.

Compromise but hold to ethics.

Don't compromise your personal values, professional ethics and your ethnicity for career development.

Don't change your morals/ethics based on the institutional norm--if the norm is unethical per your value system.

MANAGEMENT STYLE

Avoid trying to do everything yourself; delegate to help others grow and feel a sense of ownership in accomplishments.

Be fair.

Be comfortable with self.

Work well with others.

Don't be afraid to seek help in solving difficult problems. Don't delay in handling difficult problems--systems approach.

Don't delegate so much you don't know what's going on.

LEADERSHIP

Be consultative--"share governance."

Listen to those you supervise before making decisions.

Read The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Steven Corey.

Ensure that you have the support of upper management.

Take risks.

Don't posture yourself to be seen as defensive and unwilling to compromise.

Don't create no-win situations.

Don't lead every Black cause or become disturbed at every Black issue--choose well!

Don't carry your authority on your shoulders.

Don't assume that people will do what you say because you're the "boss."

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Develop strong communication skills.

Write suggestions to CEO--verbals can be dangerous in some settings.

Emphasize non-verbal aspects of leadership--dress, posture, facial expressions, body movement.

Don't slip into the vernacular while on duty.

Don't argue needlessly.

MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

Select a good mentor and be a mentor to others.

GENERAL

A manager at any level, regardless of one's color, must have good leadership skills, be open and fair in dealing with personnel, and be competent in as many skill areas as possible--especially in oral and written communication. Praise employees.

Assume additional assignments outside area of responsibility.

Try to have fun.

Pamper yourself.

Relax.

Enjoy life.

Don't overdo!

Try hard but balance your life.

Work on keeping your perspective.

Like what you do.

Like working with all kinds of people.

Maintain a sense of humor.

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